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SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN AMERICA.

The Future in America—a Search after Realities. By H. G. Wells. Pp. 359. (London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd.) Price 10*s.* 6*d.* net.

WE opened this book fearing that, like other books by the same author, it was an attempt to extrapolate or foretell the future from a mere man's quite inadequate knowledge of the present and the past; but we have been delightfully disappointed. Mr. Wells is acute in observation, he is well informed on English social problems, and he reasons carefully. His visit to America was very short, but it was preceded by much reading. He nowhere speaks dogmatically; he evidently restrains his inclination to draw general conclusions from a sense that he may be neglecting important premises, and such conclusions as he comes to seem to us to be sound and of value.

Americans have never been tolerant of outside criticism, even when it was obviously honest and good; yet surely it is needed, and is found useful by other nations. Never was an outside critic more kindly and sympathetic than Mr. Wells, and we have no doubt that during the next twenty years this book will be referred to and quoted from by every good writer on social problems, which, after all, are not peculiar to America. The American people are like the middle classes of England, France, and Germany; there is no feudal or aristocratic upper class, there is no earth-tied peasant. The American idea is the middle-class idea everywhere, but in America it has been carried out without restrictions; it fosters that kind of individuality which thrives on open and undisciplined competition for wealth.

And the time is coming when the American formula will no longer suffice. Settled conditions and great possibilities of wealth given by nature to a large middle-class kind of population have produced their natural effects. The compound interest law of increase of wealth is in action, and gigantic fortunes in the hands of quite common men have not only destroyed the idea of equality, but have become a danger to the community. Every energetic worker feels that there are limitations now being put to his chances of getting on. It is possible quite legally for rich individuals to further their schemes by widespread corruption. Corruption everywhere, but especially in municipal governments, has assumed such large dimensions that it seems impossible to remedy the evil. The average man attends to his own personal affairs, and has no sense of his duties as a citizen. He resents all Government interference. Indeed, it is part of the American formula that the cultured and rich men, and one may say the best men, take no interest in Imperial or State or municipal affairs—to touch pitch is to be defiled—and that the ordinary citizen thinks only of his own interests in this world and the next. Immigration is no longer British and Teutonic. The German and Russian Jew, the lower classes from Austria and Italy and Turkey are—nearly one million of them a year—welcomed as necessary recruits in the serf army of the capitalists. In this serf army the children and women are the chief sufferers. No story told of an old Lancashire factory can compete with some of the horrors of New Jersey at the present time.

There has always been in America a widespread contempt, not for the law, but for abstract justice, so that even well-minded, influential people do not set themselves to remedy obvious wrong when by so doing they might hurt themselves or their party in the eyes of multitudes of base and busy, greedy and childish, malevolent and ignorant voters. The unfairness of the southerner to the negro is no longer confined to the south, and the crimes of a few negroes exasperate white people so much that they forget the kindly ways of the average man of colour, and thus the negro question is becoming more complex.

But thoughtful Americans are already feeling the inadequacy of their old formulas. New ideas are organising themselves out of the little limited efforts of innumerable men. Many universities are busy on the study of social problems. The younger generation is already raising an opposition to the tyranny of mere industrialism by cultivating religious, philosophic, literary, scientific, artistic, and political thought, and they are doing this, not as a mere matter of taste, but in their sacred duty as citizens.

One of the most interesting chapters in this book is entitled "Culture." If it were possible to get Boston to read anything of recent date, the perusal of this chapter would produce a much-needed revolution there. Between that Scylla, the fervid ignorance of the workers of Paterson, and that Charybdis, the prestige and mere knowledge and genteel aloofness and culture which make Boston useless, the creative minds of the university reformers must steer their dangerous way. At futile Washington Mr Wells found a real man, the anxious, perplexed President, who is a microcosm of his hundred million subjects, who sees all that is wrong and the difficulty of reform. Mr. Roosevelt assimilates all that makes for reform in contemporary thought, and causes it to reverberate over the land so that it becomes familiar to all people. At the root of all reform is political reform, creating a legislature at Washington and an executive which shall be in harmony with one another, and which under proper safeguards shall be able to put aside the present obstruction of the various States. Only a great educated and sustained agitation can bring about such a revolution.

Mr. Wells would almost leave us still in doubt—may not America, after all, be a great futility? But just at the very end we find him optimistic. We are inclined to think that Mr. Wells pays too much attention to America of the present, and that if he thought more of America of the past he would be altogether optimistic. Mrs. Trollope and Cooper and Dickens differed but little in opinion, and can any candid student of their writings deny that America

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has surmounted social difficulties which looked almost insuperable sixty years ago? What Mr. Wells says is all true, but there is also much more to be said. The average American neglects politics and selfishly thinks of his own interests; yes, but every now and again he shows himself capable of the highest kind of self-sacrifice. At the back of the futile Boston culture is the spirit of Charleston Neck and Bunker's Hill; and the cultured Bostonian had this great merit, he saw that Abraham Lincoln could save the country. We consider that the worst thing in America is Philistinism, commonness or vulgarity of thought; the great merit of Boston is that she has always combated this. Then, as to immigration, we believe that an intermixture of all the European races (and, if we could only get it, an assimilation of the Jews) would produce the very finest nation ever known. These lower races of whom Mr. Wells speaks are a danger only for a time; in the second and later generations their presence will be shown in a better appreciation of music and literature and painting.

The supreme danger to any State lies in the diminution of its middle class; this is the greatest lesson of history. We see no chance of such a diminution in America for a very long time to come. Furthermore, there is an evident growing determination in this middle class that social problems shall be solved at whatever cost. Lynching is altogether evil, but it occurs only in certain parts of a country of enormous size still nearly empty of inhabitants; it certainly is altogether against the spirit of the American people, one of whose strongest characteristics has always been a respect for *law*. It was a product of the slave system, and is diminishing.

The Europeanised American who scorns politics is truly a curse to himself and his own country and to Europe, but there is now a new revelation. Mr. Roosevelt is not the only rich, educated American who has conquered his fear of touching pitch. We agree with Mr. Wells as to the inferiority of American school education, the root of all evils; but the sole cause of this is poor payment for teachers, and, like many another great mischief in America, may be altered almost by the stroke of a pen. Has not universal spitting, the habit most dreaded by Dickens, disappeared in one half-year? Anything in the way of quick reform is possible in a country like America, where everybody reads, and where the cheapest monthly magazines, published by millions, contain serious articles about the great American problems and reforms; where in all States north of the Washington parallel the people resemble the Scotch; that is, even the commonest labourers are accustomed to abstract reasoning because of their early religious education. We cannot doubt that it will work out triumphantly its own and our salvation, for it is to be remembered that all the insoluble-looking problems of America are coming for solution more slowly upon England and France and Germany. We believe that Mr. Wells has done something important towards solving such problems, and it is not merely America that ought to be grateful to him.

JOHN PERRY.

NAVAL CHEMISTRY.

Service Chemistry: a Short Manual of Chemistry and its Applications in the Naval and Military Services. By Vivian B. Lewes and J. S. S. Brame. Third and revised edition. Pp. xvi+675. (London: Henry Glaisher; Greenwich: J. Glaisher, 1906.)

THIS book was primarily designed for the use of officers passing through the Royal Naval College, Greenwich, who while requiring to know something of the practical applications of chemistry to their profession if they are to carry out its multifarious duties intelligently and efficiently, have only a very limited amount of time to give to the study of the science. The naval officer nowadays is confronted with conditions which were absolutely unknown to and undreamt of by those who were placed in charge of our old "wooden walls." Steam and steel and high explosives have completely revolutionised the navies of to-day, and modern men-of-war are the embodiment of the most advanced developments of mechanical, physical, and chemical science. He who would handle these costly creations to the best advantage needs to have acquaintance with the scientific principles upon which their construction, maintenance, and effective employment depend, and what intelligent handling means, and what momentous issues may depend upon it, was demonstrated in a manner which profoundly impressed the whole world in the ever-memorable battle of the Sea of Japan. That object-lesson has given rise to much heart searching on the part of every maritime Power. Whether we are bettering the example of our Eastern ally—whether, indeed, we are really following it—is a matter which gravely concerns this nation. It would, of course, be out of place in this connection to discuss the various factors upon which the astonishing success of Japan depended; patriotism, courage, the spirit of self-sacrifice, discipline, intelligence, and integrity—in a word, what we understand by *moral*—were no doubt at the bottom of it all. But these qualities alone might have availed little unless supplemented by skilful direction of the machinery and appliances of which our modern engines of destruction are built up, and skilful direction depends upon an intelligent appreciation of the scientific principles underlying the construction and efficient use of these appliances. The rulers of rejuvenated Japan had clearly grasped this fact, and it cannot be questioned that it is to the manner in which they have given practical effect to this recognition in the training of their naval and military leaders, even during the short space of a generation, that their supremacy in the East is mainly due.

There is, of course, much in chemistry which in no conceivable circumstances can have the slightest professional interest to the naval man, and which, therefore, it would be useless and a waste of time to trouble him with.

But every naval officer is the better for knowing something, for example, of the causes of corrosion and fouling of ships; of the nature of boiler incrustations; of the properties and composition of various forms of fuel; of the chemical characters of explosives,

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